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LINCOLN'S GRAVE

**LINCOLN'S
GRAVE**

BY
**MAURICE
THOMPSON**



**CAMBRIDGE
AND CHICAGO**

**STONE
AND
KIMBALL**

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STONE & KIMBALL.



THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO THE PHI BETA KAPPA
BROTHERHOOD OF HARVARD COLLEGE, IN GRATE-
FUL REMEMBRANCE OF THE SYMPATHETIC
WELCOME GIVEN ME AT SANDERS THEA-
TRE WHEN THE POEM WAS READ,
AND IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF
THE HIGH HONOR AFTER-
WARD BESTOWED.

*At a change in the tide of the years,
When the wind puffs strangely and veers,
And the moon is old, and the stars
Redden and threaten all night,
And by day the sun glares white,
And the sky is an omen of wars,
We taunt one another; and then,
When the firmament darkens and jars,
'Mid the smoke and the thunder of fight,
We feel the measure of men
While cleaving our way to the light.*

SHERWOOD PLACE,
CRAWFORDSVILLE, INDIANA.
1893.

ἀμάρτυρον οὐδὲν αἶδω.

LINCOLN'S GRAVE.

I

MAY one who fought in honor for the South
Uncovered stand and sing by Lincoln's grave?
Why, if I shrunk not at the cannon's mouth,
Nor swerved one inch for any battle-wave,
Should I now tremble in this quiet close,
Hearing the prairie wind go lightly by
From billowy plains of grass and miles of corn,
While out of deep repose
The great sweet spirit lifts itself on high
And broods above our land this summer morn?

LINCOLN'S GRAVE.

II

Yon little city bumbles like a hive,
And yonder fields are rolling like the sea,
From lake to gulf our peaceful millions strive ;
Old notes of discord sink to harmony ;
And here beside this grave I stand apart
Clothed in my birthright's plentitude of power
And feel the thought within me rise and yearn,
 And overflow my heart !
I am the poet of this golden hour ;
A whole world's aspirations in me burn.

III

And, erst a rebel, I am not a saint ;
For dear as life the memory of those days,
Those comrades, that young banner ; not a taint
Of shame my record holds. I speak the praise
Unbounded of my camp-mates who yet live,
Or those, with honor shining bright as gold,
Who went to death, as to a banquet going ;

And proudly do I give
A song to you who kept the banner old,
The dearest flag o'er any country blowing !

LINCOLN'S GRAVE.

IV

Whose children walk with bright uplifted heads
Under that flag by bullets rent and cloven,
By factions torn and ravelled into shreds,
By loving hands untangled and rewoven?
Both mine and thine, no matter where we fought,
Our wedded veins now spill a warmer flood
Than poured at Wilderness and Rocky-face;
 The victory we sought,
Each fighting for what seemed his children's good,
Came when that banner reached its rightful place.

LINCOLN'S GRAVE.

V

Broad is our view and broad our charity,
Deep calls to deep, and height to height appeals,
With the foregathering voice of prophecy,
And boundless is the scope our morn reveals !
Blue as an iris-petal bending over,
And violet-sweet this cloudless sky of ours ;
Thrills in our air the vital fire of truth,
 And o'er us swarm and hover,
Like golden bees o'er nectar-burdened flowers,
The rare imperious potencies of youth.

LINCOLN'S GRAVE.

VI

Oh, is there now a North so arrogant,
A South so narrow and so bitter still,
It bosoms any thought malevolent
Under that flag on freedom's stately hill?
Not those who charged between the batteries,
Crashing midway like meeting cannon-shot,
Can ruminatè old hatreds o'er again,
 Stifling warm sympathies
And friendships true that cowards value not;
Not soldiers good, for they are gentlemen.

VII

O Federal soldiers, ours, as well as thine,
The passionate wild love of home and land !
When Georgia called I felt the thrill divine,
And who could quell my heart or stay my hand ?
We rushed together on the field of death,
Unmindful of ourselves ; behind us lay
Home, mother, country — all that life is worth !

Even now I feel the breath
Of courage that did hurl me through the fray,
And strand me by the ramparts of the North !

LINCOLN'S GRAVE.

VIII

Right seems to dally as it strolls along ;
But still it moves and never backward goes ;
Each pace is certain, every pose is strong ;
Crushed in its vestiges it leaves its foes,
And yet no man escapes its loving care,
Or dies in vain its honest combatant,
Or fails to conquer fighting by its side !

Like incense on the air
Went up brave souls where bayonets crossed aslant
And every bosom held a patriot's pride !

IX

Old soldiers true, ah, them all men can trust,
Who fought, with conscience clear, on either side ;
Who bearded Death and thought their cause was just ;
Their stainless honor cannot be denied ;
All patriots they beyond the farthest doubt ;
Ring it and sing it up and down the land,
And let no voice dare answer it with sneers,
Or shut its meaning out ;
Ring it and sing it, we go hand in hand,
Old infantry, old cavalry, old cannoniers.

LINCOLN'S GRAVE.

X

And if Virginia's vales shall ring again
To battle-yell of Moseby or Mahone,
If Wilder's wild brigade or Morgan's men
Once more wheel into line ; or all alone
A Sheridan shall ride, a Cleburne fall,
There will not be two flags above them flying,
But both in one, welded in that pure flame
 Upflaring in us all,
When kindred unto kindred loudly crying
Rally and cheer in freedom's holy name !

LINCOLN'S GRAVE.

XI

Great heart that bled on every awful field,
Deep eyes that wept for every soldier dead,
What time the Blue or Gray swept on or reeled,
What time, triumphant, Meade or Johnston led ;
True heart that felt our country one and whole,
Kind eyes that saw to love beyond the strife,
Inspire me, fill me, hold me close and long,
 My every source control,
So that the richest veins of human life
Thrilled through by thee may consecrate my song !

XII

I, mindful of a dark and bitter past,
And of its clashing hopes and raging hates,
Still, standing here, invoke a love so vast
It cancels all and all obliterates,
Save love itself, which cannot harbor wrong ;
Oh for a voice of boundless melody,
A voice to fill heaven's hollow to the brim
 With one brave burst of song
Stronger than tempest, nobler than the sea,
That I might lend it to a song of him !

XIII

Meseems I feel his presence. Is he dead?
Death is a word. He lives and grander grows.
At Gettysburg he bows his bleeding head;
He spreads his arms where Chickamauga flows,
As if to clasp old soldiers to his breast,
Of South or North no matter which they be,
Not thinking of what uniform they wore,
His heart a palimpsest,
Record on record of humanity,
Where love is first and last forevermore.

XIV

His was the tireless strength of native truth,
The might of rugged, untaught earnestness ;
Deep-freezing poverty made brave his youth,
And toned his manhood with its winter stress
Up to the temper of heroic worth,
And wrought him to a crystal clear and pure,
To mark how Nature in her highest mood
 Scorns at our pride of birth,
And ever plants the life that must endure
In the strong soil of wintry solitude.

LINCOLN'S GRAVE.

XV

Close to the ground what if his life began,
In rude bucolic self-denial keyed,
Fed on realities, yet hearing Pan
Along the brookside blow a charmèd reed!
O flocks of Hardin, you remember well
The awkward child, and had he not a look
Of one forechosen of grand destiny?

In field or forest dell

Did he not prophesy to bird and brook,
And shape vague runes of what was yet to be?

XVI

Born in the midway space where freedom seemed
To sport with slavery, and half way o'er
From where the South in golden luxury dreamed
To that old rock of Plymouth on the shore
Made holy by the touch of pilgrim feet,
He grew to stature of the largest mold,
A stalwart burden-bearer trudging on
 And up to that high seat,
Which never more the like of him shall hold,
Over rough ways, through pain and sorrow drawn.

XVII

Giant of frame, of soul superbly human,
Best measure of true greatness measures him ;
Crude might of man, the native sweet of woman,
The immanence of destiny strange and dim,
Brawn-building labor with the axe and maul,
Braced and enriched him to the uttermost,
And filled those founts that wisdom bubbles from,
 Made him so kingly tall,
So notable of mien 'mid any host,
The leader and the master strong and calm.

XVIII

He, the last product and the highest power
Of elemental righteousness and worth,
Gave all his life, that in Time's darkest hour,
Dear Freedom should not perish from the earth,
And steadfast in the centre of the storm,
Grim as a panther for its cubs at bay,
He was the one, the fixed, the president,
 The overtowering form,
That broke the bolts of every thunderous day,
And made itself the nation's battlement.

XIX

Set for the right his vision absolute
Compassed all charity, nor failed to see
That highest sense of right may constitute
Grant's glory and the noble strength of Lee ;
His eyes were never narrowed to the line
By which the bigot gauges every look ;
In Sherman's will, in Stonewall Jackson's prayer
 He felt the force divine
Wherewith the soul of loftiest manhood shook
When war with its wild glamor filled the air.

LINCOLN'S GRAVE.

XX

While all the world on Freedom gazed askance,
Ere yet more than her shadowy form they saw,
He spoke the foresay and significance,
The finest intimation of her law;
Wisdom so tender, justice so kind and good,
The warm appeal of limitless faith in man,
The goal toward which our widening cycle rolls,
 The perfect brotherhood;
These flushed his spirit; and with him began
The universal league of human souls.

XXI

Speak not of accident or circumstance,
He was the genius of primeval man
Evolved anew, despite the waves of chance ;
Along his nerves the human current ran,
Pure as the old far fountain in the shade
Of God's first trees. He knew the score right well,
And note by note, of Nature's simple staff,
 Yodled in grove and glade ;
He loved the story and the honest laugh,
The rustic song, the sounds of field and fell.

XXII

His humor, born of virile opulence,
Stung like a pungent sap or wild-fruit zest,
And satisfied a universal sense
Of manliness, the strongest and the best ;
A soft Kentucky strain was in his voice,
And the Ohio's deeper boom was there,
With some wild accents of old Wabash days,
 And winds of Illinois ;
And when he spake he took us unaware
With his high courage and unselfish ways.

XXIII

And fresh from God he had the godlike power
Of universal sympathy with life,
Or high or low ; he knew the day and hour,
Felt every motive actuating strife,
Lived on both sides of every aspiration,
And saw how men could differ and be right,
How from all points the waves of truth are driven
 To one last destination ;
How prayer that battles prayer with awful might
Eternally tempestuous rolls to heaven.

XXIV

He heard the rending of the bonds of love,
And he was rent with every snapping strand;
Toppled the temple's base and dome above,
Yawned a black chasm across our lovely land;
And yet he could not let the fragments go,
Or loose his hold on that firm unity
Welded at Valley Forge and Bunker Hill;

He heard the bugles blow
On either side, and yet how could it be?
He prayed for peace, forebore and trusted still !

XXV

He was the Southern mother leaning forth,
At dead of night to hear the cannon roar,
Beseeching God to turn the cruel North
And break it that her son might come once more ;
He was New England's maiden pale and pure,
Whose gallant lover fell on Shiloh's plain ;
He was the mangled body of the dead ;
 He writhing did endure
Wounds and disfigurement and racking pain,
Gangrene and amputation, all things dread.

XXVI

He was the North, the South, the East, the West,
The thrall, the master, all of us in one ;
There was no section that he held the best ;
His love shone as impartial as the sun ;
And so revenge appealed to him in vain,
He smiled at it, as at a thing forlorn,
And gently put it from him, rose and stood
 A moment's space in pain,
Remembering the prairies and the corn
And the glad voices of the field and wood.

XXVII

Oh, every bullet-shock went to his heart,
And every orphan's cry that followed it,
In every slave's wild hope he bore a part,
With every master's pang his face was lit;
But yet, unfaltering, he kept the faith,
Trusted the inner light and drove right on
Straight toward his golden purpose shining high
 Beyond the field of death,
Beyond the trumpets and the gonfalon,
Beyond the war-clouds and the blackened sky.

XXVIII

Annealed in white-hot fire he bore the test
Of every strain temptation could invent,
Hard points of slander, shivered on his breast,
Fell at his feet, and envy's blades were bent
In his bare hand and lightly cast aside ;
He would not wear a shield ; no selfish aim
Guided one thought of all those trying hours ;
 No breath of pride,
No pompous striving for the pose of fame
Weakened one stroke of all his noble powers.

XXIX

And so, vicariously all suffering,
Over stupendous ills he rose supreme,
Set Freedom free, made that a real thing
Which all the world had thought a splendid dream !
Across the red and booming tide of war
He sped the evangel of eternal right,
The message brave that broke the ancient spell
 And rang and echoed far ;
Above the battle at its stormiest height
He heard each chain of slavery as it fell !

XXX

And then when Peace set wing upon the wind
And Northward flying fanned the clouds away,
He passed as martyrs pass. Ah, who shall find
The chord to sound the pathos of that day!
Mid-April blowing sweet across the land,
New bloom of freedom opening to the world,
Loud paeans of the homeward-looking host,
 The salutations grand
From grimy guns, the tattered flags unfurled;
But he must sleep to all the glory lost!

XXXI

Sleep! Loss! But there is neither sleep nor loss,
And all the glory mantles him about;
Above his breast the precious banners cross,
Does he not hear his armies tramp and shout?
Oh, every kiss of mother, wife or maid
Dashed on the grizzly lip of veteran,
Comes forthright to that calm and quiet mouth,
 And will not be delayed,
And every slave, no longer slave but man,
Sends up a blessing from the broken South.

XXXII

Shall we forget what other slaves to-day
Delve, freeze and starve and wear the iron chain?
What women feel the lash, what children pray
For mother, father, home, and pray in vain?
Beware of treaties with a tyrant power,
One manly peasant 's worth a thousand Tzars,
One woman struck calls for a million sabres !
 Ring, ring, O golden hour,
Foreseen of patriots in a myriad wars !
Great soul, march on and end thy glorious labors !

LINCOLN'S GRAVE.

XXXIII

Hero and hind, thy strong, familiar pace,
Outreaching Time, is that the world must take,
If it shall find at last the lofty place
Where Glory flames and Freedom's banners shake !
Imperial hands, that never touched the helve
Of plough or hoe, may glove themselves in scorn,
At mention of those palms so hard and brown,
 Those knuckles formed to delve ;
But what empurpled despot ever born
Could buy one whiff of freedom with a crown ?

XXXIV

Oh, nevermore the tide of life shall turn
Backward upon the dark and savage past ;
The flame he lit shall grow and stronger burn
With incense farther blowing to the last !
Why build for him a monument or tomb,
Or carve his name on any temple's stone,
Or speak of him as one whose soul has fled ?

 No mausoleum's gloom,
No minster space, no pyramid grand and lone,
Can shut on him or prove that he is dead.

XXXV

He is not dead. France knows he is not dead ;
He stirs strong hearts in Spain and Germany,
In far Siberian mines his words are said,
He tells the English Ireland shall be free,
He calls poor serfs about him in the night,
And whispers of a power that laughs at kings,
And of a force that breaks the strongest chain ;
 Old tyranny feels his might
Tearing away its deepest fastenings,
And jewelled sceptres threaten him in vain.

LINCOLN'S GRAVE.

XXXVI

Years pass away, but freedom does not pass,
Thrones crumble, but man's birthright crumbles not,
And, like the wind across the prairie grass,
A whole world's aspirations fan this spot
With ceaseless panting after liberty,
One breath of which would make dark Russia fair,
And blow sweet summer through the exile's cave,
 And set the exile free ;
For which I pray, here in the open air
Of Freedom's morning-tide, by Lincoln's grave.

*Here endeth this Poem
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